

The Gita-in contemporary times; Relevant and applicable for designers

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Abstract: *Bhagwad Gita is one of the Holy Scripture belonging to the Indian culture and accepted worldwide for spiritual guidance beyond the boundaries of religions. There are hundreds of books and papers published related to the holy book establishing relevance to management, leadership, areas of sciences are to name a few. This paper talks about the practical insights derived from the Holy Bhagwad Gita for designers to understand and practice on to evolve as better version of themselves.*

To keep the paper precise and focused I will talk about the 'Agents of Change' as described in the shlokas of the Gita and project its relevance to the practice of design.

Introduction:

Modern age is an age of science and technology. Hence some person may doubt the utility of Gita in the present times. But as a matter of fact perhaps it is in the present age alone that the teachings of The Gita are the most urgently needed. It can be said without exaggeration that most of the acute problems of man at present can be solved by following the teachings of Gita. The Gita is based upon the fundamental principles of human nature and hence it will always be a source of inspiration to human beings.

The modern man is greatly in need of an effective guide as we see only problems everywhere and no solutions are to be found. Our life is filled with restlessness, anxiety, and agitation. Money, fame, success, failure and so on appear and disappear at various stages in life leaving a strong impression on us. The memories in the form of impressions shape our life. The mind is affected by these impressions. We react to the external world based on these impressions. We never see the truth which is covered by these impressions. The guidance given in Gita helps us to build a mental proof against the experiences in life and so the mind will not be affected by the experiences. If the mind is affected, then it loses the strength and it fails to understand the reality. Reality is more precious than the experiences. The Gita helps the mind to remain like a drop of water on the lotus leaf, which appears attached but in reality it's not attached with that leaf. Lord Krishna expresses this view through this sloka ;

**tasmaadasaktah satatam kaaryam karma samachara |
asakto hyaacharankarma paramaapnoti puurushah** ¹¹

(Therefore) You must always fulfill all your obligatory duties without attachment. By performing actions without attachment, one attains the Highest.

In modern times, there is lack of tolerance and forbearance. Modern man is surrounded with different types of fear, insecurity, and mistakes and so on. Negative aspects are given more importance than improving the positive aspects of life. Life is the interaction between different minds. If the mind is not pure and calm then life will be in trouble.

*Mahatma Gandhi wrote in 'Yong India' "I find in Bhagwad Gita which I even miss in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me and I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagwad Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there and immediately begin to mile in the midst of tragedies. My life has been full of extreme tragedies and if they have left no visible mark, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the Gita."*²

Gita shows the difference between the Relative Reality and the Absolute Reality. Knowledge about the relative world can give material comforts, but only the knowledge about the absolute can give peace of mind. Professional excellence, talent, excellent skills and wealth cannot make a person complete. The mentality of the person is very important to adjust in this world; else the life will be a frustrated life.

As said in *Bhagwad Gita, Chapter 6, Verse 5*

**uddharedaatmanaatmaanam naatmaanamavasaadayeth |
aatmaiva hyaatmano bandhuraatmaiva ripuraatmanah** ¹³

Let a man raise himself by his own efforts. Let him not degrade himself. Because a person's best friend or his worst enemy is none other than his own self.

In the modern Professional life man is afraid of uncertainties which may happen to him and his near and dear ones. Today as professionals we also face such situations many times in our workplace when we could not take a decision because of fear of uncertainties or our decisions are biased because of our attachments and inclinations. In fact in varying degrees every man is a victim of disease which Arjuna's body and mind was experiencing at that time, and every man needs the cure of Gita to perform right actions at right time

The Gita shows the difference between the Relative reality and the Absolute reality. Knowledge about the relative world can give material comforts, but only the knowledge about the absolute can give peace of mind. Professional excellence, talent, excellent skills and wealth cannot make a person complete and satisfied because the mental state of the person is very important to adjust in this world; else the life will be a frustrated life. One of the most important sloka of Gita is about the action to be performed without the expectation of the result. As lord Krishna says to Arjuna in *Chapter 2, Verse 47*.

**karmanyevaadhikaaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana |
maa karmaphalaheturbhuhu maatesangotsvakarmani ¹⁴**

A person has the right towards action alone and not towards the fruit of action. Let not the fruit of action be the motive for acting. Also, Let there not be any attachment to inaction.

If the motive is result alone, then it will definitely deviate one from the action, and the result will be failure. Therefore, the work has to be performed for the sake of work and not for the result.

Bhagavad Gita makes us understand that source which is the Supreme Brahman, is non-dual and it exists in all. This source cannot be divided and it means the Ultimate. The Gita makes us realize the infinity in ourselves. At present our success depends on showing the world about our achievements. Little attention is paid on self-satisfaction of job. Our success and failure depends on how others react to our work. One is hesitant to pave the path due to fear for the result, criticism, non-acceptance from the society and so on. We feel more convenient to follow the path paved by others. But the knowledge of Gita gives us that mental strength to thread our own path. Here Krishna says to Arjuna the same;

**uddharedaatmanaatanam naatmaanamavasaadayeth |
aatmaiva hyaatmano bandhuraatmaiva ripuraatmanah ¹⁵**

Let a man raise himself by his own efforts. Let him not degrade himself because a person's best friend or his worst enemy is none other than his own self.

Practical relevance of Gita to modern human and society:

Bhagavad Gita gives clarity to life. Our intellect is always engaged in planning and decision making. Mind is engaged in imagination. Through the mind and intellect one connects to the outside world. One must train the mind to engage in worldly activities and at the same time must be able to withdraw the mind inwards whenever needed. Our mainstream education does not give guidance to survive in times of difficulties and depression. It only gives knowledge about the external factors in life. This education can earn a person material wealth and comforts but not peace of mind. Bhagavad Gita helps the seeker to search the real treasure inside him. If one studies Bhagavad Gita along with their mainstream education, then definitely it helps to transform him as an able and courageous person and he can help many others to reach that state.

Bhagavad Gita forms an educated state of awareness and consciousness.

Gita's ethics is universal in nature and needs to be applied to any situation in life. It is a message addressed to each and every human individual to help him or her to solve the vexing problem of overcoming all shortcomings.

Gita addresses the modern youth's problems and issues; such as, how to achieve success in life, controlling one's passions, learning to be an effective leader, decision making and so on. While generally people deal with them at material and external and peripheral levels, the Gita goes to the root of the problem, setting right our view of the world and the resultant thinking. Once the thought changes, there is a visible change in the quality of action as also our response to the result. There are numerous ways in which the teachings can be applied in the context of the present day youth. Let us focus on two very vital areas namely overcoming stress and lack of motivation or focus. Stress is the reaction to a demanding situation and it can occur in two levels, physical and psychological. Physical stress is caused by physical causes such as accidents, infections and ailments etc. It is a reaction of the body to face the trauma due to diverse factors. Psychological stress on the other hand is a reaction to mental situations such as fear, anxiety, tension, anger, depression etc. A youth who has to prove his ability and rise up to the expectation of the society undergoes a taxing time and it results in accumulation of stress at the cost of psychological breakdown and negative thinking. Added to this is violence and restlessness. Gita provides valuable guidance to overcome these. How to remain motivated despite all hurdles is a major issue in life. If we need a constant drive and enthusiasm, we have to handle our negative thoughts and anxiety. The key to self-motivation is to understand our thoughts and effectively handle them, Gita provides the guidance in this pursuit.

The Gita further says that we should learn to work with dexterity and take refuge in *Buddhi* or the higher intellect. To work with dexterity means enjoy working without any self-defeating thought. Gita contains enough insight to help young struggling individuals to develop into wise, responsible and successful human beings. What is needed is faith and practice. Gita's emphasis on doing one's own duty unmistakably and skillfully will serve as a boon to modern world of wayward tendencies.

In the modern times when all the efforts of the world peace seem to rest on the walls of sand, Gita's teaching of world brotherhood can very well guide humanity. The ultimate end, according to Gita is the consolidation of society. It has not only preached for the welfare of human beings but even that of all living beings as m. h. Gita has that liberality which is characteristic of Indian thought.

The Gita is an incredible book because of its intrinsic value in solving the fundamental human problem. It shows us a way to live our life effectively. It will continue to bless people of the past, present and posterity, the only thing is that, one has to choose to expose oneself to it.

Insights for Designers:

The Gita also talks about the 'Agents of Change' as described in the shlokas of the Gita and project its relevance to the practice of design and designers./ to the designer.

Design is study and practice of identifying and solving problems through innovative implementable ideas.

As designers we strive hard to create everlasting happy experience for the users of our products. In the process we identify needs and desires, ideate, prototype, test and refine our design at various stages to be it ready for the user as a product. As a human being designers also gets influenced by daily ups and downs of life, human behavior variations which reflects in their work too.....

All the human beings in this world, moving and non-moving are born out of the union of *Purusha* (Self) and *Prakrati* (Catalyst of change), these changes happen due to the effect of the 'Agents of Change'. Now establishing an analogy to the concept to Purusha-Prakriti and relation of purusha a designer and prakrati the design.



Fig-1: Analogy of Purusha-Prakriti to Designer and Design

Agents of change:

- **Agent of Error:**
This agent can be considered influenced by *tamas guna*. It blinds the designer from seeing the different requirements of the user. It forces the designer to focus on one requirement and ignore others.
- **Agent of Equal Opportunity:**
This agent inspires a designer to respect and accept the individual existence of every requirement. This agent can be considered influenced by *Rajas guna*. Like the one who enjoys eating mango also accepts other fruits on earth has justified existence.
- **Agent of Oneness:**
This agent forces designer to discover unity in diversity. Like all fruits from the seed which are created by god, the way all the requirements are coming from user and they are not self-generated or manipulated by other elements.

These agents influence designers and exist in all designs in varying proportions. These agents force designer to think in particular direction which results in imbalanced design thinking.

Who gets attracted to which agent or which agents have higher influence on the designer can be greater research for human psychology, what matters is being aware of the presence these agents of change have in a designer's consciousness while designing.

As these agents effects human consciousness they also affect the *Design Consciousness* which ultimately affects the experience a design meant to create for users. Design consciousness is key to achieve a balance in parametric clarity of needs, desires and goals as input for design thinking and design to happen. These parametric imbalances generated by the agents of change causes rejections and/or failures of design to occur.

Effects of imbalanced presence of the agents of change makes bound by their qualities of affects the design, which majorly falls in the domain of followings-

- Functionality
- Visual appeal/Aesthetics
- Usability and Accessibility

A simple observation of the surrounding will reveal that we are all surrounded by different type of products, some are more useful to us and some are not, some are desired and some are needed by us. Whatever these products are one thing which can be quoted is that – all these products and services are designed either by an informed conscious designer or by designers driven by the agents of change or just by accident. A fair participation of an informed conscious designer will certainly improve the experience of the product...

Agent of change can be put to equilibrium through developing understanding of the few key aspects derived from Gita-

- **Goal and experience:** Understanding the difference between the goals as steps of design and experience that design is meant to create helps to shape the product. Identifying the key functions and providing them works as foundation for building experiences.
- **Needs are more important than desires:** Addressing a need in the design is foremost than adding features which are desired. No matter how much hard-work is put in addressing a feature, if it doesn't solve the need or fits in the parameters it fails.
- **Remember parameters:**
Each design work is bound by some parameters and boundary conditions,. Defining them and exercising them to leverage a design should be called as best practice. These parameters are as important as identified requirements, product definition is often derived from these parameters, for example these can be budget, time, technology constraint, user segment etc..

Conclusive Note:

So we can say that the circumstances in the present times are however different from those in the time of Gita. In the context of Gita, Arjuna was tending towards renunciation. The modern men, however, tend in the opposite direction. But the need of Gita for the modern man is no less than it was for Arjuna, since both require a balance. Gita has advocated integral perfectionism. It refuses all one sided developments. It preaches 'renunciation through activism'.

Hence the need of teaching of the Gita now is as great as ever. Its value has not lessened through lapse of time and that is a mark of its greatness. As a matter of fact, Gita is beyond the distinctions of space and time. Several types of temperament can attain peace through it. Its teachings have reached every country and have found place in thoughtful persons everywhere. Bhagavad Gita is a timeless, universal devotional text that looked beyond all differences and which was understandable and easily practiced by the every common person.

References:

1. *Bhagwad Gita, Chapter 3, Verse 19*
2. *Gandhi, Mahatma: Young India p.38*
3. *Bhagwad Gita, Chapter 6, Verse 5*
4. *Bhagwad Gita Chapter 2, Verse 47.*
5. *Bhagwad Gita Chapter 6, Verse 5*

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